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OFFICE-SEEKING DURING THE ADMINISTRATION OF JOHN ADAMS.

DURING the four years of John Adams's administration there were fewer applications for office than there had been during any corresponding period of Washington's term. This was not due alone to the fact that there were fewer vacancies to fill, for there were few during the latter half of Washington's administration, but was owing to several causes. One was that Adams had not a large personal following. He was open-hearted and had harmless weaknesses, such as at other times and in other men have rather increased than lessened the popularity of their possessor, but there was also an aloofness and coldness of character about him, coupled with a confidence in himself and an assertive mastery which failed to conciliate. He was, too, emphatically a New England man and, while he had served the whole country long and with conspicuous ability, his personal acquaintance outside of New England was not extensive. Washington, on the other hand, had, in the course of his public career, lived in the North and East, as well as in the South. He knew many men and his circle of personal friends was large. He was in every sense a national character when he became President. His personal qualities commanded the respect of all and the devotion and veneration of many. Moreover, he had been at the head of a victorious army, and all the ardent affection which a soldier feels for his successful commander the men of the Revolution felt towards him. Therefore it was that after the war people who wanted offices appealed to him with a feeling that they had a filial right to do so, and in most cases they accepted in a filial spirit the refusal he gave them. There was no such feeling towards Adams. However much he was respected he was not generally liked, and eminent as his career had been it had contained no instances which fired the popular heart. People came to him for favors unwillingly and not in large number, and the applications for office breathe little of the spirit of personal attachment to him. When they were unsuccessful they often left behind them animosity and bitterness. It must be remembered that office-seeking had not, at that time, been reduced to a science, proceeding upon fixed rules, and the estimation in which the President personally was held played

an important part in regulating the number and tone of the applications for office.¹

Another reason why the applications were not numerous was that Adams gave a considerable latitude of independent action to the heads of the departments, and many of the appointments were prompted by them. The applications were, therefore, scattered among several officials, whose powers were uncertain, and they were fewer than they would have been with but one known active appointing power.

At the same time there was greater display of party feeling in the office-seeking while Adams was President than there had been before. The hostile political organizations had formed when Washington was in power, but they had been held in check by his influence, which dominated one party and had a restraining effect upon the other. But John Adams was a strong party man himself, and the hostile measures which the Federalists took against the Republicans met with his approval. Even had he counselled moderation the people would not have listened to him. It was evident that they had grown impatient of submitting to the dominating influence of one man. They were tired of hero-worship and were resolved to have, for a time at least, no successor to Washington; and if Adams had had every attribute of a popular hero he would still not have been recognized as one. The war between the parties which had been waged with some violence when Washington stood between the combatants now became general and fierce. By means of pamphlets, by letters, by songs at the theatres and in the streets, by the passing of resolutions, by speeches everywhere, either party sought to bring confusion upon the other. It is doubtful if party heat was ever greater in this country before or after the Civil War. To make the bitterness uncompromisingly intense there entered a question of our relations with a foreign power which was thought to involve the national honor. War with France seemed to one side to be almost inevitable if we were to preserve even a semblance of our self-respect, yet there was a French party in the country which deprecated any hostile measures against our former allies and which sympathized with them passionately in their Revolution. It is not strange, therefore, that whereas during Washington's administration the political opinions of applicants for office seldom appear and

¹ This is shown by the applications during Jefferson's presidency. The idol of a party and a man of great personal popularity, he had, during his first term, more than twice as many applications for office as Adams had. If the statistics of modern office-seeking were available they would show that a President without a personal following is almost, if not quite, as much the victim of systematized office-seeking as a "magnetic" President is.

were seldom considered in making appointments to any but the very highest offices (except in Rhode Island, where opponents of the adoption of the Constitution were not appointed), the case was different during the Presidency of Adams. The intolerant political temper which prevailed is reflected in the applications for office and illustrated by them. In many instances, probably a majority, the political opinions of the candidates for domestic civil offices were brought out. In the appointments abroad and in the military appointments politics did not figure. Regarding the latter Adams wrote to the Secretary of War, McHenry, as follows :

“Merit I consider, however, as the only scale of graduation in the army. Service and rank in the last war, or in any other war, are only to be taken into consideration as presumptive evidence of merit and may at any time be set aside by contrary proof. Service and rank in civil life and in time of peace, I think, ought not to be forgotten or neglected, for they are often of more utility and consequence to the public than military services.”¹

Nor were all the applicants for domestic civil office Federalists. Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg, who had been Speaker of the House of Representatives, became a candidate shortly after he left Congress.

SPRING GARDENS, NEAR PHILAD^A

Sept. 8th, 1797.

Sir

The office of Treasurer of the Mint having become vacant by the Death of D^r Way permit me most respectfully to offer myself a Candidate for the same. A series of misfortunes to a Son in Law of mine occasioned by french Captures have also affected me very materially, and being at present out of public Employment, I have both Leisure and Inclination to attend to the Duties of this or any other Office You may think proper to honor me with, whilst at the same time it would afford me some aid in a situation I have never been accustomed to. Submitting my Application to your Decision, permit me to add, that if appointed I shall execute the Duties enjoined with Diligence and fidelity, if not, it will never lessen that cordial Attachment and high respect with which I have the Honor to be

Sir,

Your most obedient

humble Servant

FREDK. AUG. MUHLENBERG.

*The President of the U. States.*²

¹ Works of John Adams, VIII. 640.

² The letter is from the MS. archives of the Department of State. All of the other papers quoted in this article, unless otherwise specified, are from the same source.

He next applied for appointment as collector at Philadelphia.

PHILAD^A June 5th 1798.

Sir,

Having understood, but last Evening, and not before, that the Office of Collector of the port of Philadelphia had become vacant by the Resignation of M^r Dulany, permit me to take the Liberty in the most respectful Manner to offer myself a Candidate for the same, or, if a promotion of either the naval officer or Surveyor should take place, for either of the offices, which may become vacant in consequence thereof. To you, Sir, I flatter myself my Conduct and Character is well known, and I trust, altho' I am not at present in any public Employment, that bred and born in the County of Philadelphia, and living amongst them I still have the Goodwill and Confidence of my fellow Citizens, and if necessary can obtain as respectable signatures to certificates of Recommendation as any other Candidate that may offer. . . .

If in the course of our political Disputes, whilst I had the Honor of a Seat of Congress I have erred, I can only say, that influenced by neither party I acted according to the best of my Judgement, and according to what in my Opinion was most for the real Benefit of our beloved Country, to whose Constitution and Government no one in the U. States can be more warmly attached than myself, and which I shall ever firmly support against both foreign and domestic foes, whilst I have Breath. . . .

. . . I have the honor to be

Sir,

Your most obedient

humble Servant

FREDK. A. MUHLENBERG.

The President of the U. States.

A disappointed office-seeker can always find some deeper motive than a mere preference for another in his rejection, and Muhlenberg conceived that he had been passed by because of Hamilton's animosity towards him. Shortly before Jefferson's inauguration he wrote to him and disclosed this opinion.

LANCASTER, Feby. 11th, 1801.

Sir,

It being the prevailing Opinion, whether well or ill founded, I do not presume to judge, that a Change will be made in the Revenue officers of this State, acting for the United States, permit me in the most respectful Manner to offer myself as a Candidate for the Office of Collector at the Port of Philadelphia. Tho' I humbly hoped I had some small claim on the Public . . . I was again obliged to seek for public

Employment, and accordingly made Application for the Office of Treasurer of the Mint, but met with no success. Some time afterwards, when the Office of Collector became vacant by the Resignation of M^r Delany, I was advised by my friends to apply for it, and from their Information as well as some Hints given to me, I had reason [to] expect Success. But whatever good Wishes may have been entertained for me, M^r Wolcott's Influence prevailed. This Gentleman I had offended by taking the active part I had in discovering his friend Hamilton's Affair of Gallantry, and thus I had once more to lament my fate and sing with Ovid: *Cur aliquid vidi, &c.*

I have the Honor to be

Sir

Your most obedient

humble servant

FREDK. A. MUHLENBERG.

Tho^s. Jefferson, Esq^r.

Presd^t. elect.

Most of the civil appointments made by Adams were to collectorships and other customs offices, and the applications were often addressed to Oliver Wolcott, the Secretary of the Treasury. The custom-house at New York engaged the President's attention soon after his inauguration. The collector, General John Lamb, a distinguished soldier in the Revolution and an ardent Republican and follower of the Livingstons and Clintons, was old and in ill health, and a very serious defalcation, arising from the rascality of a trusted under-official, had been discovered.¹ Alexander Hamilton was communicated with relative to a successor to Lamb. The reply, in his handwriting, but unsigned, was doubtless addressed to Wolcott.

ALBANY, April 22, 1797.

Dear Sir

My absence from New York to attend the Court here has put it out of my power to answer sooner your Letter of the 13th instant.

The characters which occur to me as proper to be considered for Collector are these—

Benjamin Walker—This Gentleman you know as well as I do. He is every way qualified and fit, and had he remained in the place of naval officer he might, qualified as he is, have looked to that of Collector almost as a matter of course—but the having quit the former terminates the pretension on that score. He stands a candidate at large. As such however, he equals any in the requisites for the Office and has the peculiar advantage of Experience in relation to it. But you ought to be apprised that from his engagements in certain agencies from abroad &c,

¹ See Leake's *Life of John Lamb*, p. 353 *et seq.*

he has for a long time executed the naval office chiefly by deputy—and if he should be concluded upon for the other it ought to be well understood that his *intire personal attention* is expected and the *relinquishment* of his agencies, for I suspect they *will not* harmonize.

*Matthew Clarkson*¹. This is among the worthiest and best esteemed of our citizens. Till his appointment to the Office he now holds he has had little familiarity with accounts, but I should believe his attention and care, *upon principle*, would ensure a good execution of the office and his personal qualities would render his appointment peculiarly acceptable. I believe however, he is connected in Trade—and I do not know that he would relinquish it for the Office.

Nicholas Fish². I have a perfectly good opinion of this Gentleman—who is also very generally esteemed and according to my ideas of him, he would execute the office as well as any man and there is no circumstances in his situation against it. I presume he would prefer it to that which he now holds.

You however who have had the conduct of both these Gentlemen in their present Offices, more immediately under your eye in different capacities, can from thence judge what that conduct promises in the other offices. There is *I know* always inconvenience in the change of a man who is in the train of a particular office. But there is also the motive (of no small consequence) of encouraging men to accept offices of less eligibility by the expectation of better when then occur.

*Aquila Giles*³. There are few whom I should have preferred before this gentleman, had I not been lately told that there have been some delays in bringing forward monies which came into his hands as Marshall. You probably have more light on this subject than me and can appreciate the force of the objection. He is however less a man of business than some others.

Gulean ver Plank (now President of the Bank of New York) He is a man of superior mental endowments to any of [those] who have been named and of superior acquirements. His moral character is of the most estimable sort. His habits have not led to a familiarity with accounts—and he is supposed not much addicted to labour. But I think he would *upon principle* apply himself closely to a good execution of whatever he should undertake. He is a man of moderate fortune and has no particular pursuit—so that I think he might be willing to accept though I am not certain.

Jonathan Burrall (now Cashier of the office of Discount) According to my opinion *no man* would be *better qualified* or more *faithful*. He is respectably connected in our State by marriage—and well esteemed though not of *important* standing in our community. He would however be an acceptable appointment.

¹ He was Commissioner of Loans for New York at the time.

² Supervisor of the District of New York.

³ Marshal for the District of New York.

James Watson—would no doubt be *well qualified* and there is every ground of confidence in his fidelity. He affords the public the security of a good fortune. It must however not be omitted that by *Something* in his character, too much fondness for office, by some marks of indecision and temporizing in lesser matters, he is far less well esteemed in our community than the other characters who have been named.

For *qualifications* relative to the Office I should prefer—*Walker Fish Burrall* and *Watson*.

None of the men mentioned by Hamilton were selected, but Joshua Sands, in whose favor no papers are now on file, was nominated and confirmed as collector May 19, 1797, Lamb being dismissed.¹ The competition to secure such appointments was keen, and in the case of the collectorship at Norfolk began before the incumbent was dead.

Norfolk was at that time a city of rising importance. In 1806 Jefferson expressed the opinion that it would eventually be a greater sea-port than New York and only second, perhaps, to New Orleans.² The collector of customs, when Adams became President, was Colonel William Lindsay, an old officer of the Revolution and a friend of Washington's. Associated with him as surveyor of customs was Daniel Bedinger, also an officer of the Revolution, who had served in the custom-house before the Constitution was formed, and when Josiah Parker, afterwards a member of Congress, was the collector. A young relative of Lindsay's, Francis S. Taylor, was also employed in the office, and during the protracted illness which preceded Lindsay's death Taylor acted as deputy collector. He was intimate with Lindsay's family and was engaged to be married to his daughter. He was poor, Lindsay's recovery was impossible, and his family, after his death, would be ill provided for. It was highly desirable, therefore, that they should not lose the salary of the office. The merchants of Norfolk, for reasons disinterested or otherwise, were favorably disposed to Taylor, so an ingenious scheme was set on foot for his succession to the collectorship, Lindsay apparently having full knowledge of and approving it. It took the shape of an application for the office for Taylor five months before Lindsay died. James Hunter, of Norfolk, unfolded the plan in a letter which is unaddressed, but which was probably sent to one of the Virginia senators or representatives, by whom it was laid before the President or Secretary of the Treasury.

¹ *Executive Journal of the Senate*, I. 240.

² *Travels in the United States*, by John Melish, I. 201, 202.

NORFOLK, VIRGINIA 20th April 1797.

Sir

Col. Wm. Lindsay the Collector of this port has for a long time been in a declining state of health, he is now reduced so low that I think He cannot live many days,—this Gentleman upon enquiry you will find was a distinguish'd active officer during the American Revolution he is a Man of the Strictest honor, and unblemish'd reputation a firm and try'd friend to his Country. as a reward for his success and merit the late President (who knew him well) gave him the appointment already mentioned at the commencement of the present Government. his conduct in office the records of the Treasury department will evince. M^r Lindsay has a large Family—an amiable Lady and Six children. the emoluments of office ceases with the incumbent. Now Sir with the foregoing introduction I must beg leave to inform you that a relation of M^r Lindays a M^r Francis Taylor a Young Gentleman of talents and Integrity has for several years as Deputy Collector conducted the business of the office under M^r Lindsay with the utmost propriety, that an alliance will shortly take place between him and a Daughter of the Collector—that by his succeeding Coll. Lindsay in office the means of comfort and happiness would be afforded the Family—and I have further to add that M^r Taylor is in possession of the best wishes and fullest Confidence of his fellow Citizens

For these reasons Sir I most earnestly solicit your interest in your official capacity for M^r Taylor. his character will stand the strictest scrutiny—and his appointment under the circumstances I have already mentioned will be an additional reward to the virtues and merits of his Predecessor.

I shall be extremely gratified by a few lines from you when convenient and remain Sir

with esteem

Yr ob servt

JAMES HUNTER

This was followed in two days by a letter from the merchants at Norfolk.

NORFOLK April 22nd 1797.

It is with extreme regret we mention that an Indisposition which has long afflicted the Collector of this port, must very speedily terminate his Existence, an event much to be lamented, not only because it will deprive Government of a good Citizen and valuable officer but because Society in losing Him will lose a worthy and respectable Member.

While we anticipate the fate of Major Lindsay with the most afflicting sensibility, We cannot in justice to M^r Francis S Taylor (who has for five years past officiated as his Deputy) omit recommending Him as a Character, whose experience, talents, Integrity and zeal for the Government, render Him highly qualified to succeed to the important station of Collector of the Port of Norfolk and Portsmouth.

A long acquaintance with this Gentleman in private Life, and in the exercise of the official duties, which for some time past have wholly devolved on Him, authorize us confidently to state the most unequivocal assurances in his behalf as a person highly meriting public confidence and private esteem. To you we have thought it proper to communicate these sentiments, as an Officer of the Government and request you will make a representation of M^r Taylor to the president of the U States

We should feel happy in his success and are persuaded the Government will find in Him an attentive respectable and valuable Officer.

We are with the highest respect

Your most obt

ROBERT TAYLOR, JNO. LAWRENCE,

GILBERT ROBERTSON, and 32 other
individuals and firms.

The movement in Taylor's interest having reached the ears of Bedinger, the surveyor, he wrote to Parker, a member of Congress and a Republican, who sent the letter to Wolcott.

NORFOLK, April 25, 1797.

Dear Sir

I had not been at home more than an hour before I was informed that the Paper (mentioned to you by Mr. Cowper) recommending Mr. Francis S. Taylor as a proper person to fill the Office of Collector for this port, had been handed about in the most private manner possible. That it was offered to none but those who were supposed to belong to a particular party. And that the Secret came out by their mistaking Mr. Granberry to be of that party, who you know is (notwithstanding his mercantile pursuits and foreign connections) an honest, independent, native American, influenced by no party whatever. When it was offered to him, I am told he flatly refused to sign it, because he could not in his conscience promote a scheme which neither justice, nor a regard to common decency could possibly sanction. And because, also, he could not surmount the repugnance he felt at the idea of signing a paper upon which the names of Gilbert Robertson and other foreigners appeared most conspicuous. To say nothing of the indelicacy of this attempt whilst Major Lindsay is still living (and alive like to be, at least for some time to come) it seems a little extraordinary that a set of men, the majority of whom are strangers, or characters who were never friendly to our revolution, should endeavor to foist over the heads of *others*, a young man, *unborn*, or at best but in his cradle at the commencement of our revolution, and who, one would suppose (from the Secret, not to say clandestine, manner in which his cause has been espoused) is now supported for particular reasons and to answer particular purposes.

You know M^r Taylor personally but perhaps are not acquainted with

particulars. He is about 22 years of age. Was brought to Norfolk by his uncle Richard Taylor late Captain of the revenue cutter, in the year '91. For several years after he acted as an under clerk in the Custom house, until M^r Coleman Deputy Collector quitted that office, when M^r Taylor was appointed in his stead.

But it has been said that M^r Taylor is betrothed in marriage to the daughter of the present Collector, who being perhaps sensible of his approaching dissolution, has been prevailed upon to resign his office in favour of his *intended* son in law. I have also reason to think that the recommendatory paper mentioned in the early part of this letter, was forwarded to the President in order to secure his appointment. Whether this be so or not I cannot say ; but it seems to me that a *death-bed* resignation looks too much like a *bequest*—that this kind of *succession in office* has too greatly the appearance of the *inheritance of office*, ever to be countenanced by the President of the United States, should he be truly informed of all the circumstances attending this Case.

As you are acquainted with my intention of becoming a candidate for the Office of Collector of this District, when it shall be vacant and when I can come forward with propriety, I hope you will excuse my prolixity on the subject. I flatter myself too that you will be pleased to communicate to the proper department such information as you may think proper, in order to prevent the precipitate appointment of any man to the office in question, on the mere suggestion, or recommendation of men who I am well assured are (at least a majority of them) what I have described them to be.

M^{rs} B. and her sisters join me in Compl^{ts} to M^{rs} Parker, Miss Nancy and yourself. No late arrivals ; nor anything new either from Europe or the West Indies.

I am, with the greatest respect

D^r Sir

Your most obedient Servant

DANIEL BEDINGER.

The Hon^{ble} Josiah Parker Esq^r

Parker supplemented this letter with the following to Wolcott :

MACCLESFIELD April 26th 1797.

Sir

I had the honor to write you from Smithfield since which I have rec^d a letter from M^r Bedinger the Surveyor at Norfolk in respect to a vacancy said to have taken place at Norfolk for a Collector. . . .

I had the management of the Customs at Norfolk for this State. for a long while M^r Bedinger was my deputy. I found him a man of Talent and integrity. Upon my being elected to Congress I resign'd the office. M^r Lindsay and M^r Bedinger were competitors for it. the Council wa.

divided. A compromise took place. Lindsay was to be appointed and Bedinger to aid in the business and share in the emoluments.

When the new System was adopted M^r Lindsay was appointed Collector, Mr. Gatewood Naval Officer and Mr. Bedinger Surveyor. the latter was made Surveyor because it was supposed by the President that the office would be more lucrative than that of the Naval Officer.

As to M^r Taylor I see no pretensions he can have to expect the Office. Was he to be preferred to Surveyors in the same district of better talents and more respectability it would doubtless be complained of and I have other reasons which I shall give why M^r Taylor should not receive the appointment when I have the pleasure to see you which will be I hope by the 15th next Month.

With much respect

J: PARKER.

The next month two new candidates appeared in the field (Lindsay being still alive), in Miles King and Otway Byrd. With reference to the latter General William Heth, who had apparently been approached by Wolcott on the subject, wrote :

Private

CITY POINT, 23th May 1797.

Dear Sir

Thank you for your private letter of the 8th Ins^d and the Confidence reposed in me.—Respecting a Collector for Norfolk when a vacancy shall happen, a very proper character may be had, in Col^o Otway Byrd, who has informed Col^o Carrington of his intentions to become a candidate.—Carrington and myself, have had much conversation on this Subject. He appears as desirous as I am to see that office, *for once*, properly filled, and being well acquainted with Colo. Byrds character, qualifications, and abilities, he is well Satisfied that he *ought*, under every consideration to be appointed in preference to any one we have thought of: and indeed he was pleased to say, that if I did not wish to go to Norfolk, he did not know a more fit character in every respect, than Col^o Byrd.

I have just understood that the Merchants of Norfolk have, or that they intend to present a joint recommendation in favor of M^r Taylor, the Young Man who long acted as Deputy to Lindsay—and who actually does the business at this time¹ — (tho' Reuben Long, *signs* as Deputy), but does not appear officially, in consequence of his being concerned in trade, or merchandize of some kind. I am inclined to give credit to this report, because I *know* that Carrington was applyd to some weeks ago, to recommend M^r Taylor, when, among other reasons to induce him to

¹ I should not consider it as a *very great* compliment to be highly recommended as a Collector by the Merchants, owners and Masters of vessels of Norfolk—or indeed any other District. (Note in the original MS.)

do so, he was told that, 'such an appointment would benefit Lindsay's family, as Mr. Taylor was to marry his daughter'.—But, application was made to the wrong man. Carrington declared with candor, that he would do no such thing, nor would he *ever* recommend any *young man* to fill such an office; besides, he knew nothing of Mr. Taylor's qualifications—nor could I say anything thereon when applyd to, having no personal knowledge of him.—But, in the course of business, I have seen many marks of very loose conduct in him, as Deputy Collector, and have had abundant reason to believe that he does not possess a common knowledge of the Laws.—And this, must ever be the case, when the whole duties of such an office, are committed to a deputy, and when that Deputy, has his private business to attend to.—Never, since my knowledge of Norfolk, has the business of the Naval Office been conducted by the Principal. This will in some measure account for the very lax conduct which hath obtained there. During Parkers *reign*, the most shameful abuses were practised. The wine, cheese, Porter, &c. which he rec^d as presents, supplyd his table in the most ample manner.—at least, so says fame, to this day. And that he lost upwards of £20,000 to the State, by taking the bonds of *improper persons*, there is no sort of doubt. Indeed, Colo Jarvis the late Atty. General, said in my presence not many months ago, that he believed the sum so lost to Virg^a amounted to near £30,000. And this, is the Man, who had the effrontery to stand up in Congress and say, that *his* confidence in the President (George Washington too) had diminished.

But what is not *such a man*, capable of saying, or doing?—I wish Peter Porcupine knew this man's History well.

I am Dear Sir,

With very sincere esteem and
friendship

Yrs

W. HETH.

Lindsay died September 1st, and the contest for his place became more active than ever, a number of new candidates sending in their applications. General Edward Carrington wrote letters with reference to Taylor, Bedinger and Byrd. Of the first he said simply that he had heard him well spoken of, and that his endorsers were men of respectability. Of Bedinger he wrote :

RICHMOND Sep^r 11, 1797.

Sir

I am requested by Mr. Daniel Bedinger, the present Surveyor and Port Inspector at Norfolk, to say to you that I know of his pretensions to the office of Collector there, which is now vacant. In my letter of 21st of Jan^y last, on the contract business, I was full as to my opinion of this Gentleman. As a Port Inspector I will not hesitate in saying he is not sur-

passed in the United States ; and, from his real cleverness in business, and a knowledge that he acted as deputy to the Collector of that Port under the State Laws, from 1783 to the new order of things under the Federal Government, and from thence to this day, in his present employments, I am confident that his pretensions, on the score of experience must be of the first degree.—having known for many years, I am confident that in point of Capacity and integrity he is unexceptionable. While I say this much, candor calls me to mention, that he is understood to have been amongst the opposers of the administration in, at least some of, those subjects which have agitated the public mind ; and with those connected with the appointment it must rest how far that circumstance should have weight in the determination.

I am very respectfully

Mr. Bedinger was a
faithful officer in the late
war having entered into the ser-
vice very young and continued
to the end of the War

Sir

Your most ob st

ED CARRINGTON.

His letter about Byrd was more enthusiastic.

RICHMOND, Sep^r 11, 1797.

Sir

Col^o Heth sometime ago conversed with me at the instance of Col^o Otway Byrd, on the pretensions of the latter to the Collectorship of Norfolk and Portsmouth, on an expected event of the death of M^r Lindsay.

Col^o Byrd has throughout his life been remarkable for a consistent, independent and honest deportment. When the militia army was about to take the field against the insurgents in 1794, He was appointed by the Executive of Virginia to the office of Quarter-Master for this States quota. . . . He discharged the duties of the station with full effect, and rendered his accounts with a promptitude and accuracy beyond my expectation, considering the raw and undisciplined state of the troops to whose accommodation he had to administer. . . .

Col^o Byrd acted his part in
the late Revolution, and is
a firm supporter of the present
gov^t and administration.

I am very respectfully

sir

Your most ob. st.

ED. CARRINGTON.

Oliver Wolcott Esq.

November 24, 1797, Byrd was nominated and confirmed for the office.¹ The appointment apparently gave rise to adverse comment,

¹ *Executive Journal of the Senate*, I. 251.

and the fact that Bedinger had not been promoted was attributed to political motives. Nearly two years later Adams wrote to Wolcott :

QUINCY, 4 October, 1800.

Dear Sir,—Enclosed is a letter from Mr. Daniel Bedinger, with a certificate in his favor from Governor Wood. I suppose this letter comes too late ; but that, if it had arrived earlier, it would have made no alteration in your judgment or mine. Neither Mr. Parker nor any other person ever had authority from me to say, that any man's political creed would be an insuperable bar to promotion. No such rule has ever been adopted. Political principles and discretion will always be considered, with all other qualifications, and well weighed, in all appointments. But no such monopolizing, and contracted and illiberal system, as that alleged to have been expressed by Mr. Parker, was ever adopted by me.

Washington appointed a multitude of democrats and jacobins of the deepest dye. I have been more cautious in this respect, but there is danger of proscribing, under imputations of democracy, some of the ablest, most influential, and best characters in the Union.¹

There cannot be any doubt that Adams endeavored to obtain worthy men for the appointments he made, but if he did not wholly proscribe members of the Republican party he at least showed such a preference for Federalists that few who were not members of that party received any favors at his hands.

We come now to the subject of removals from office. In the papers covering the eight years of Washington's presidency, there are no letters urging dismissals from office for political reasons. In the archives during Adams' term there are such letters, and a few removals were made of incumbents who had evinced an aggravated and offensive political opposition to the administration. Other causes, however, usually entered into the dismissal, and the action was not, save perhaps in one or two cases, wholly political. A fair illustration is found in the case of Joseph Whipple, collector at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and William Gardner, the commissioner of loans for that state. Both had been appointed early in Washington's administration. A year after Adams became President, Jeremiah Smith, United States attorney for New Hampshire, wrote the following letter to Wolcott :

EXETER 14 June, 1798.

My dear Sir

.
As to Gardner and Whipple

They have been it is generally said faithful and punctual in the discharge of the duties of their offices. They have some property and I be-

¹ *Works*, IX. 87.

lieve are pretty free from debts and speculations. Their political conduct has been disrespectful to the Government and offensive to good men in the extreme. There is this difference between them Gardner is open and decided Whipple more cunning and cautious but they are both violent Jacobins and have spared no opportunity of exciting opposition to the Government and have used their official consequence and situation for that purpose. I have repeatedly heard that the loan officer would observe when applications are made to him for payment of interest, that he is ready to pay *now*, but it is altogether uncertain whether anything will be paid the next quarter if this or that governmental measure should take place.

The Collector makes similar observations to merchants who complain of bad Voyages or bad Times—telling them that all these things flow from the cursed British Treaty. In short they are both open bitter enemies of the Gov^t and Partizans of France and would give me a great deal of pleasure to see them *rewarded* with offices under the latter. They have merits and claims for such appointments. The deluded and deceived multitude at Portsmouth have deserted their leaders and have left these men nearly alone in the opposition. I am not disappointed at their perseverance. I never have yet known a real thorough Jacobin converted by light or knowledge. The defect lies in the heart. They hate the light because it reproves their deeds which are evil. I have no hesitation in saying that I think Justice to the public requires the removal of these men. They surely can not complain if that Government which is the object of their execration should weaken their means of injuring and abusing it.

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I have the Honor to be
with sincere esteem Sir
Your most obed^t servant
JEREMIAH SMITH.

The Secy of the Treasy.

Another complaint against Whipple followed the next day from one who accused him vehemently of unjust exactions. After stating his grievance at length, this correspondent adds :

How it happens that a Man of his *Character*, especially of his *political Character* should remain so long in the most lucrative office in the State, is I believe a wonder to *every* Merchant here, for I suppose every one esteems him one of the most inveterate Jacobins in the United States, and I can safely challenge him to produce an instance for several years past, of his ever expressing a *single sentence* in favor of our Government, or the *Measures of the Executive in particular*; but directly the reverse, and believe the universal opinion from his conduct is, that he is most decidedly opposed to the *Administration*, if not to the *Government* it self.

I need not remark that such conduct, in the first officers of Govern-

ment in the State, have astonishing influence on the People, as they are supposed to know fully the views of Government.

As my intention is an application to you for redress, must intreat Your interference, that Justice may be done.

Pleas to pardon the length of this letter, espetially at this critical moment, I should not trespass^t so much on Your time, but I could no longer bare the oppression, of the Collector—and this being the first complaint of the kind I *ever* made I hope to have no occation for another.—

I am unknown Personally to You, or the heads of the Departments, except a very small acquaintance with the Hon^l Secretary Pickering, who perhaps may give You some small information, respecting my character, if you will be so obliging as to inquire of him.

I am Sir with all due Respect

Your Most Obed^t

Hum^l Serv^t

ELIPH^l LADD.

On June 30th, John Pierce was nominated to be Commissioner of Loans in place of Gardner, and Thomas Martin to be collector at Portsmouth in Whipple's place.¹ It was concerning these removals that Adams wrote his friend Benjamin Lincoln, March 10th, 1806:

When I came into office it was my determination to make as few ernovals as possible—not one from party considerations. This resolution I have universally observed. Conviction of infidelity to a trust cannot be resisted, and gross misconduct in office ought not to be overlooked. The representations to me of the daily language of several officers at Portsmouth, were so evincive of aversion, if not hostility, to the national constitution and government, that I could not avoid making some changes. Mr. Whipple is represented as very artful in imputing individual misfortunes to measures of administration, and his whole influence to have been employed against the government, and Mr. Whipple must take a more decided part before he can get over the prejudices against him . . . If the officers of government will not support it, who will? I have no ill will to Mr. Whipple, and no prejudice against him, but I still think his removal was right.²

Jefferson restored both Gardner and Whipple to the service, removing those whom Adams had appointed in their stead.

But the most important removal from office for political reasons by Adams was that of Tench Coxe, the Commissioner of Revenue. The story must be told at some length, and in order to understand it, it will be necessary to quote several of the applications for office made during Jefferson's presidency.

On July 10, 1798, Matthew Lyon, at that time a member of

¹ *Executive Journal of the Senate*, 1. 283.

² *Works*, IX. 46, 47.

Congress from Vermont, sent to Wolcott a list of seven persons whom he recommended for office as commissioners to carry into effect the act levying a direct tax upon the valuation of lands, etc. He spoke of them as men of "Respectability, Responsibility and Knowledge of the relative value of property," and added that he was impelled by a sense of duty in writing the letter. Of the six commissioners appointed, but one, Jonathan Spofford, was included in Lyon's list. Lyon was a violent Republican, and his attacks against the administration culminated in his trial and conviction with fine and imprisonment, in October, 1798, for violating the Sedition Law. Among his seditious utterances were these:

"As to the executive, when I shall see the efforts of that power bent on the promotion of the comfort, the happiness and accommodation of the people, that executive shall have my zealous and uniform support ; but . . . when I shall behold men of real merit daily turned out of office, for no other cause but independency of sentiment, when I shall see men of firmness, merit, years, abilities, and experience, discarded in their applications for office, for fear they possess that independence, and men of meanness preferred for the ease with which they take up and advocate opinions, the consequence of which they know but little of . . . I shall not be their humble advocate."¹

While Lyon was still undergoing his imprisonment he was re-elected a member of the House of Representatives, and when he appeared after his release and proposed to take his seat his expulsion was moved. Albert Gallatin, in speaking in his behalf, said the statement that men of firmness had been discarded in their applications for office was a matter of fact, and that such men had been turned out of office. "I do believe," said he, "that the first assertion is true, and what is here written is no more than an illustration of what has been declared on this floor, that men of certain political opinions, however capable, experienced, firm and virtuous they might be, were unfit to hold the offices." This, Gallatin said, was the only fact which could be brought under the law, and he thought it a fact capable of being proved to be true. He adduced, as evidence of the fact, the cases of the late Commissioner of Revenue for the United States, and of the Commissioner of Loans for the state of New Hampshire, who, he said, it was evident were turned out of office on account of their political opinions.²

The Commissioner of Loans referred to was Gardner, whose case we have already touched upon. The Commissioner of Revenue was

¹Wharton's *State Trials of the United States, during the Administrations of Washington and Adams*, p. 333.

²*Annals of Congress*, 5th Cong., III. 2971.

Tench Coxe, of Pennsylvania, who was dismissed in the latter part of December, 1797. While in office he had carried tales to Duane, the editor of the *Aurora*, the most scurrilous of all the Republican papers, and had given other aid to the opposition, as his letters to Jefferson, when he applied for reinstatement to office, clearly indicate. Wolcott informed him that his dismissal was due to "deliberate misconduct in office."¹ It was received with gratification by the Federalists. George Cabot wrote Wolcott, congratulating him on having "finally expelled a traitor from the Treasury who never deserved to be trusted," and added: "The toleration of such a fellow in office after his duplicity was known indicates truly a weakness in the government and I have never yet believed that this kind of policy was wise."² William Smith, of South Carolina, the minister to Portugal, wrote: "I am very happy to hear you have got rid of Tench Coxe. I suppose he will follow the steps of Randolph, Monroe, etc., and write his vindication without more ado."³ A vindication he did not write, but from revenge he circulated a copy of a letter written to him in confidence by Adams in 1792, which contained reflections against the supposed British proclivities of the Pinckneys.

Coxe's career had been erratic and uncertain from the beginning. During the Revolution he left the Pennsylvania militia, of which he was a member, to join the British forces, but he came back again later to the patriot side. After the war he was at first a Federalist and applied for an office, his letter breathing a fervid admiration for Washington. He was appointed Commissioner of the Revenue in 1792. He was a man of talent and of pretensions to knowledge of political economy and he published several papers, some over his own name and some anonymously, on the subject of American trade. It was in connection with one of the latter that John Quincy Adams many years later described him as a man of "wily, winding, subtle and insidious character."⁴ His letters to Jefferson asking reinstatement in the service show the reasons for his dismissal as he conceived them. They were entirely partisan, he thought, and had originated in Hamilton's hatred for Jefferson, and they gave him a claim to reappointment. Jefferson and Gallatin, his Secretary of the Treasury, and Republicans generally in Philadelphia, agreed with him.⁵ Under date of March 10, 1801, imme-

¹ Gibbs, *Administrations of Washington and Adams*, II. 6.

² Id., II. 9.

³ Id., II. 55.

⁴ *Memoirs*, IV. 370.

⁵ . . . "But Captain Lewis says that the Republicans in Philadelphia seem generally agreed that, in case of removal of either of the two custom-house officers, he,

diately after Jefferson's inauguration, Coxe sent in his application. "I will not suppress," he said, "the expression of a consciousness that I have undergone the most injurious and severe trials in the public service as a citizen lately, and before as an officer." A little later he set forth his "claims" at length. The letter is undated, but it is endorsed in Jefferson's hand, "rec'd. Apr. 18, 1801."

(Private)

Sir

The gentleman who received my office on my unjust extrusion has retained it, and will probably continue in it longer than the present Collectorship of the Revenue will last . . . My situation, be assured, Sir, has been thought extremely delicate in respect to that office and it has occasioned much remark by friends, and foes and dispassionate and candid men concerned only for a rational execution of Government. . . . The world see me yet unprovided for—*yet unrestored—my old office held by him that extruded me*—the best Branch of it given to another (Gen^l M) and I a non-commissioned officer of the system. I submit to you, Sir, whether the most negative character, extruded as I was, would not be lowered by these circumstances in the public eye. I submit, Sir, whether I have merited it—whether there is any man who has labored more, or with more effect, or with more injury to himself *to prevent a counter-revolutionary operation* from 1792 to 1801 than I.

In this state of things and under such circumstances it is supposed you are about to make one or more changes in the customs. I have rec^d nothing yet from your justice or your friendship, and am a Merchant, who have joined practice in navigation, importation and exportation to practice in superintending our commerce for two years in the Treasury, and to reading, and study in the foreign and domestic theory and legislation of it. With what success, I submit. In all commercial countries such men are employed by good and wise rulers. On these grounds I beg you, Sir, to consider my pretensions to the *one* place in the customs w^{ch} you may vacate, if only one, and to the second, if two. I beg you to consider whether Gen^l M. having rec^d one office from you and I assurances after his appointment to that, whether, I say, I am not entitled to any vacancy which I can fill as well as he, if there be one only vacated. If there be two, I still express my *cheerful* disposition to take the least profitable one.

I expect, *in confidence*, that he cannot remain in it. I am satisfied the event I mentioned will take place in Penns^a unless he does what

Mr. Coxe, is entitled to the preference. . . . I feel no hesitation in saying that, on the grounds of public service and capacity, as well as on account of his having been formerly removed, Mr. Coxe's pretensions to the most lucrative of those offices which may be vacated appear well grounded." Gallatin to Jefferson, June 21, 1803. Adams, *Works of Albert Gallatin*, I. 123, 124.

many republicans think no man has a right to do. At all events however the question of giving one gentleman *two capital* appointments to the delay of claims such as you have been pleased to say mine are, is respectfully submitted. Permit me to express to you my sincere belief and apprehensions that your giving him a *second* and *commercial* appointment to my exclusion, after so long delay will do all in your power to consummate my depression and disgrace. The trivial appointment of a comm. of Bankruptcy, which Judge P. will have the power to render fruitless by running upon the three he likes, to the exclusion of the other two, will neither maintain my large family, repair my substantial losses nor restore me to public honor and confidence. The office cannot produce 1200 Dollars *p* annum, and is a very uncomfortable and inconvenient one.

I perceive that I shall be unable to endure my situation without seeking relief, and that relief can only be in a seclusion from my political connexions and relations in the Bosom of my family. The world will see that if an office in the customs does not afford an opportunity to provide for me, nothing ever can—and they Will consider my disgrace as deliberate and complete. In this *trying* situation, it will be my endeavor, with the support of heaven, to maintain a temperate, virtuous and judicious conduct. May God grant that so bitter a cup as exile at the hands of my friends may pass from me. Yet such, Sir, appears to me to be the inevitable afflicting consequence of your exhibiting me on the rising of the legislature in the Situation I have mentioned. I entreat you to pardon this last effusion of a deeply wounded spirit. On serious reflexion I could not justify the omission of the final attempt to avoid the evils I deprecate.

I have the Honor to be, Sir,

Y^r mo. respectf. serv^t

TENCH COXE.

This was quickly followed by another letter without date, in the postscript of which he described the cause of his dismissal.

“Permit me to add to this letter, sir, already too long a few particulars which I am sure you would wish to know and remember. Soon after the removal of the government from New York to Philad. I expressed an opinion before a number of members of Congress at my own table, that the Sec^y of State was the officer on whom the law should devolve the Govern^t in the event of the death &c. of the President and V. Pres^t. I found myself called on the next day by Mr. I.¹ of the Senate and an earnest expostulation took place. Mr. Hamilton considered it as a preference of a person whom he called his Enemy. The consequence was an irremovable unfriendliness and indeed hostility for the last ten years. I found a like displeasure in two Gentlemen of the S. who discovered

¹ Senator Ralph Izard, of South Carolina.

from some table of mine, shewn naturally by you, that I had contributed to the stock of information on which your report in favor of their own fisheries was founded. You remember the deportment of Mr. H. upon the subject of the Sea letters, which I undertook, without an idea of compensation and completely arranged so as to meet your entire approbation and that of Gen^l W. You may judge of the temper and deportment to me. The like temper and deportment was manifested on the occasion of the Report upon our foreign commercial relations, for it was impossible to conceal from jealous eyes the preparation of papers extracted often from Treasury sources. These and all other similar matters were adverted to in the trying expostulations, to which I was subjected for not adhering to a line of conduct grounded, as I conceived upon geographical American party, and personal prejudices, the whole produced, as I believe, by enmity to the principles adopted in the Revolution of 1776—republican principles. These things cut me off from all chances of preferment, if they could be prevented. My decent and fair investigations of the principles of an eminent candidate in 1796, devoted me to sacrifice. A few months worked my immolation. In 1798 the publication of those papers (*The American Merchant*) by which, in private, I had affected the minds of many in the extraordinary session of 1797, brought on menaces of exile and destruction, which I will prove to you, Sir, by several persons. In this course of firm and constant exertion I have been till I saw the republican cause made safe by the success our State election crowned by your own. Permit to ask whether a mere indemnity in some decent form and at some early day is not worthy of the prudent and honorable consideration of the friends of republican government. It is the certainty that you would be impressed with such pretensions which has brought forth those machinations of rival and jealous spirits against me with which you have been assailed.”

Such intense partisanship as Coxe’s letters reveal made plain the cause of his dismissal by Adams. Holding the opinions he did he could not have been a faithful officer in the administration of a Federalist.

While Adams dismissed a few men like Coxe because of their extreme partisan conduct, he did not deem that political services alone constituted a claim to office. That the general opinion was not favorable to the appointment to office of persons who belonged to a different political school from the administration is clear enough, but the doctrine that mere efficient party work should be rewarded by office does not appear to have been prevalent.

GAILLARD HUNT.